

Message from Acting Commissioner Nancy Navarretta



August 31 has been designated as International Overdose Awareness Day, a time to raise awareness of overdoses, reduce the stigma of drug-related death and, along with the families and friends left behind, remember those who have died. Having lost 1,273 lives in Connecticut to the opioid epidemic in 2020 is a sobering reminder that Opioid Use Disorders (OUD) remain a serious public health threat in our state. In a remembrance ceremony at the State Capitol in Hartford beginning at 11:00 a.m., elected officials, local community providers and advocates will come together to honor individuals who have lost their lives to an overdose and to acknowledge the grief and loss felt by families and friends. At the same time, we will come together to offer hope to those still suffering and spread the message that overdose is preventable and recovery is possible.

This month's newsletter highlights the work DMHAS is doing statewide to combat the opioid crisis and expand access to treatment and recovery services. Over the past five years, we have received almost \$60 million in federal funding, which has been invested in evidence-based treatment and supports. With a [recently announced settlement with pharmaceutical distributors](#), Connecticut will receive approximately \$300 million to continue fighting the opioid crisis. I'll be sure to share more information about our efforts to combat this epidemic in future issues.

Mobile Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) and Peer Support

MAT vans are an innovative way to increase access to medication-assisted treatment for people living with opioid use disorder. The vans, funded by DMHAS and operated by agencies statewide, are staffed by a nurse or physician and a peer recovery support counselor. Individuals in withdrawal from opioids or otherwise ready to start treatment can visit the van to receive a prescription for Suboxone to help with cravings and withdrawal symptoms. They also have immediate access to the peer counselor, a Narcan overdose reversal kit and other harm reduction supplies, referral to a treatment center, as well as transportation to a pharmacy if needed to fill the prescription. The prescription may also be delivered to the van or to their home, and the initial dosage will be overseen by the prescriber. No medication other than Narcan is carried in the vehicle or by staff. The service is free and does not require proof of insurance; however, individuals must be over 18 to utilize the service.

The following agencies operate Mobile MAT services (call for hours and locations):

- [Bridges](#) (Milford, New Haven and West Haven): 203-878-6365
- [Greater Hartford Harm Reduction Coalition](#) (Hartford): 860-263-8720
- [Liberation Programs](#) (Bridgeport, Stamford, Norwalk): 203-384-9301
- [McCall Center](#) (Torrington, Winsted, Canaan): 860-482-0322

FACT: DMHAS has distributed 31,199 Narcan kits using State Opioid Response (SOR) grant funds over the last 3 years.



Mobile Employment Services (MES)

The Mobile Employment Services (MES) project was developed by DMHAS in response to the opioid epidemic and the many challenges facing residents who are on the path to reconstructing their lives and personal ambitions. Employment Services are integral to DMHAS' goal of offering a recovery-oriented system of care for persons in recovery who experience behavioral health conditions. Understanding the mutual barriers between employment and addiction recovery, our MES program is designed to assist those in recovery in finding stable, fulfilling employment.

For many people on a recovery journey, and finding a personal pathway to physical and emotional wellness, employment is connected to recovery. A source of anxiety for many is the question of how they will meet their basic needs during early recovery--will there be a safe place to live, access to resources that support reasonably good health, enough income, food, and reliable transportation? MES supports individuals in early recovery living in DMHAS-funded halfway houses, recovery houses, and supported recovery housing who are unemployed or underemployed. MES provides hands-on support with resume writing, completing applications, and presentation and interview skills. This may include additional help with getting haircuts, professional clothing for interviews, acquiring necessary documentation and identification, and transportation.

MES provides community support in building relationships with businesses and identifying and educating employers on the benefits of hiring individuals in recovery, and matching candidates with appropriate opportunities. Consistent emotional peer support through the job application process is another facet of the program. This support continues after a candidate is hired, with a focus on continued success and professional growth.

MES is currently in operation across the state in Hartford, East Hartford, Torrington, Dayville, Stamford, North Haven, and their surrounding areas. To date, MES has supported more than 700 people in their endeavor to overcome barriers on their quest for employment with a greater than 50% success rate in finding successful placements.



"I love seeing how clients evolve once they have obtained meaningful employment. There is no greater feeling than being on the ride with them as they go from being homeless to saving money and paying rent." Sean Morits, McCall Center

"I love encouraging, motivating and empowering individuals dealing with addiction to achieve structure in their lives through employment or improving their vocational skills."

Clay Hampton, InterCommunity



"MES has afforded me the opportunity to meet some of the most sincere, humorous, resilient persons I've met during the course of my life. In this job, I'm being paid to meet new friends every week with a front row seat in the longest running show on earth. The name of that show is "humanity.""

Greg Dunn, Laurel House

Opioid Overdose Prevention/Naloxone (Narcan) Initiative

Naloxone, also known as Narcan, is a prescription medication that reverses opioid overdoses. It is a safe and easy to use medication that you can get from your doctor or a certified pharmacist. CT Medicaid and most commercial insurance covers naloxone, although there may be a co-pay or deductible.

All 50 states now have naloxone access laws designed to make the lifesaving medication more available. It is impossible to abuse naloxone, as its only job is to reverse opioid overdoses. Naloxone is only effective on opioids (heroin, OxyContin, Vicodin, fentanyl, etc.) and persons given naloxone who have not overdosed on opioids will not be harmed. In any overdose situation, 9-1-1 should be called and naloxone should be administered if opioids are involved or suspected to have been involved.

How Can I Get Naloxone?

Your primary care provider/family doctor can give you a prescription for naloxone that can be filled at any Connecticut pharmacy.

[Pharmacists in Connecticut who have completed training](#) to become certified can both prescribe and dispense naloxone.

DMHAS-funded [Regional Behavioral Health Action Organizations \(RBHAOs\)](#) can provide training as well as naloxone.

[DPH-supported mobile vans offering Specialized Syringe Programs](#) for needle exchange that also offer naloxone and training.

Harm Reduction programs may also offer free naloxone and training. [Click here for a list of syringe service \(needle exchange\) programs in Connecticut.](#)

LiveLOUD & PROUD

LiveLOUD was launched to prevent, discourage and destigmatize opioid addiction by reaching those who have been most directly impacted by the opioid crisis and connecting them with the necessary treatment, support and resources so they may begin their path of recovery.

For more information about opioid use disorder and resources available, please visit www.liveloud.org.

PROUD (Parents Recovering from Opioid Use Disorder) is a new DMHAS program that serves pregnant and postpartum women with substance use disorders, including opioid use disorder, in the Greater Hartford and New Britain areas, as well as surrounding towns.

PROUD teams can complete a family needs assessment with eligible women and their households to create a plan to address individual and family needs around substance use and mental health treatment, connections to medical providers (including prenatal care), employment, housing, and recovery support.

For more information, please visit portal.ct.gov/PROUD

